

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L CAIRO 11928

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, PINR, EG

SUBJ: ARMS SEIZURE IN UPPER EGYPT

REF IIR 6 899 0316 76,

1. REF MSG REPORTED EGYPTIAN SEIZURE OF 1263 LIGHT MACHINE GUNS IN LUXOR AREA AND EGYPTIAN MILITARY SPECULATION THAT ARMS CAME FROM LIBYA FOR USE OF MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD. FOLLOWING REPORT, WHICH APPEARS TO BE ACCOUNT OF SAME INCIDENT, IS SUBMITTED IN CLARIFICATION.

2. JULY 1 AHAM AND JULY 14 AKHIR SAA CARRIED REPORT OF EVENTS LEADING UP TO ABOVE WEAPONS SEIZURES. ACCORDING TO PRESS, FOLLOWING SHARP INCREASE IN CRIME IN QENA GOVERNORATE, ESPECIALLY TOWN OF SAMTA, MIN OF INTERIOR DECIDED TO LAUNCH CAMPAIGN TO RESTORE ORDER. ONE HUNDRED OFFICERS AND 1500 SOLDIERS TOOK PART IN EFFORT, BIGGEST CAMPAIGN IN MININT HISTORY. CRIME WAVE SAID TO HAVE INCLUDED TRAIN ROBBERIES, BREAK-IN AT ALUMINUM FACTORY, HIGHWAY ROBBERIES AND MURDERS RELATED TO VENDETTAS. VILLAGES IN REGION HAD TURNED INTO ARMED CAMPS WHICH WAGED WAR AGAINST ONE ANOTHER AS PART OF ANCIENT FEUDS AND PRODUCED EXCEEDINGLY HIGH PROPORTION OF CRIMINALS.

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3. CAMPAIGN BEGAN JUNE 11. TWO TRAINS WERE SENT TO TARGET AREA, ONE BEARING SOLDIERS AND OTHER ARMORED CARS AND EQUIPMENT. TARGET AREA DIVIDED INTO FOUR AREAS OF OPERATION OF 36 SQUARE KILOMETERS. OPERATIONS WERE TO BE CONDUCTED "NEUTRALLY" AGAINST ALL VILLAGES WITH AIM OF AVOIDING SUBSEQUENT ACCUSATIONS OF GOVT PARTIALITY. PRESS SAYS "BATTLES" LASTED 14 DAYS. AT END, 1237 FIREARMS, INCLUDING ANTI-AIRCRAFT GUNS, MACHINE GUNS AND SMALL ARMS OF VARIOUS MANUFACTURE VALUED AT ONE MILLION POUNDS WERE SEIZED. ARRESTEES NUMBERED 121. ACCORDING TO PRESS, INHABITANTS OF AREA "LIVED TO BUY ARMS", SACRIFICING LUXURIES AND ACCUMULATING EXPATRIATE EARNINGS FOR SOLE PURPOSE OF ARMING THEMSELVES. PRESS STRESSED SOCIAL IMPORTANCE OF REVENGE IN AREA AS MOTIVE FOR EXTENT OF FEUDING AND POINTED TO HISTORICAL CHARACTER OF LOCAL POPULATION AS SOURCE OF FASCINATION WITH WEAPONS. ACCORDING TO PRESS, SOME CRIMINALS ESCAPED, AND THERE IS POSSIBILITY OF MORE CRIME IN AREA IN FUTURE.

4. ASWAN POLICE MAJOR ADDED FOLLOWING GRIM DETAILS TO REPORT AUG 31. WEAPONS, INCLUDING MACHINE GUNS, MORTARS AND EVEN BAZOOKAS, WERE MOSTLY EGYPTIAN ARMY ISSUE AND TAKEN HOME BY RETURNING SOLDIERS. WEAPONS WERE PUT TO TWO USES. FIRST WAS IN TRIBAL VENDETTAS BETWEEN QENA VILLAGES. ACCESS TO ARMS HAD ALLOWED THEM TO ESCALATE REVENGE IN ANCIENT FEUDS TO NEW AND MORE EFFECTIVE LEVELS. SECOND USE, AND PARTICULARLY IRRITATING TO GOE WAS BY HIGHWAYMEN, WHO BARRICADED HIGHWAY IN NILE VALLEY BY NIGHT TO ROB PASSING TRAFFIC. DETERMINED TO BRING QENA PROVINCE SECURITY SITUATION UNDER CONTROL, POLICE ASSEMBLED A BATTALION. ARMED VILLAGES WERE BOMBED BY BRIGADE. GOE FORCES SURROUNDED AND THEN SHELLED VILLAGES WITH ARTILLERY AND SHOT ANY WHO ATTEMPTED TO FLEE, INCLUDING WOMEN AND CHILDREN. ARTILLERY BARRAGE WAS THEN FOLLOWED BY SHORT PAUSE, DURING WHICH POLICE DELIVERED ULTIMATUM OF IMMEDIATE SURRENDER OR ANNIHILATION. ACCORDING TO POLICEMEN, VILLAGES BADLY DAMAGED, BUT HE JUSTIFIED GOE ACTION BY DESCRIBING GANGS AS "FIERCE MONSTERS, NOT HUMAN." OTHER HIGHWAYMEN CONCEALED THEMSELVES IN DEEP CAVES IN HILLS ALONG VALLEY. THESE WERE SMOKE-OUT WITH TEAR GAS AND ROUNDED UP ALONG WITH LARGE STORES OF ARMS.

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5. ACCORDING TO POLICE OFFICER, SECURITY SITUATION IN QENA NOW COMPLETELY NORMAL AND SAFE FOR COMMERCIAL AND TOURIST TRAVEL. HE DID NOT SUGGEST AT ANY TIME CONNECTION BETWEEN QENA WEAPONS AND POLITICAL OR RELIGIOUS REBELLION.

6. COMMENT: UPPER EGYPT PROVINCE OF QENA HAS REPUTATION AS TRADITIONAL BANDIT COUNTRY WITH HISTORY OF BITTER FEUD-

ING. POLICE OFFICER'S ACCOUNT LENDS AUTHENTICITY TO PRESS
REPORTS. HIS REPORT OF SHOOTING OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN STRIKES
US AS OUT OF CHARACTER FOR EGYPTIANS, BUT IT MAY BE TRUE.
MAJOR DID NOT SAY WHETHER OR NOT HE PARTICIPATED. EMBOFFS
HAD DISTINCT IMPRESSION THAT HE HAD NOT BEEN EYEWITNESS.
EILTS

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